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Interinstitutional Cooperation: Hopes and Reality

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Address delivered to Conference on College and University Inter-institutional Cooperation, Princeton, New Jersey, April 13, 1962

Interinstitutional Cooperation: Hopes and Reality

H. W. K. Fitzroy, *Administrator*
University Center in Virginia

The major proportion of the deluge of college students we must expect during the next decade will not be educated by the present wealthy and better-known institutions. Many of these institutions have already announced policies of remaining in size very much as they are. The overwhelming proportion of the increased number of students will be educated by seven hundred publicly controlled institutions and one thousand private, relatively small, modestly endowed colleges and universities scattered throughout the country. The problem of maintaining standards and adequately training the young people of America will devolve largely upon these latter institutions. Given unlimited funds this might not be too difficult, but they must accomplish this end with rather limited resources. They will need every help they can be given, including the frequently neglected help they can give each other.

These seventeen hundred institutions are scattered over the country, but a study of their geographical distribution reveals that many of them are clustered in and around urban areas. The distance between one college and the next never seems to be very far, and most colleges are within commuting distance of at least one or two other colleges. The distribution of institutions of higher learning within the larger urban areas bears a striking similarity. There will usually be two or three liberal arts colleges with religious affiliations. There may be a city college and a tech-

nical or professional institute. The state university may be located there, or have a branch or extension division. Frequently there will be a seminary, and occasionally a medical college. In small towns within a fifty-mile radius there may be two or three more colleges; one of them will be a state teachers college under a new and slightly deceptive name and, if the area is fortunate, there may be a strong well-endowed non-sectarian liberal arts college. This is not a pattern, if to use the word suggests that things were planned this way. This arrangement is one of the most frightening monuments to rugged individualism to be found in America. These institutions, however, reflect a substantial part of the American dream, and are a testament to our democratic faith in education.

The Independent College Struggle

The relations of these institutions with each other are affected by a number of factors. I need but mention religious differences. South of Mason and Dixon's line there is also the racial complication. Except for the liberal arts colleges, the institutions have differing educational objectives. Traditionally they have all been somewhat competitive with each other. They have competed for funds, for students, for faculty members and, lamentably, for football players. There are also, admitted or not, substantial differences in academic standards. Some of the institutions may be relatively rich and some may be poor. The presidents of these institutions are apt to have a joking relationship with each other, but seldom meet together.

Most of these institutions have an inadequate library, but each of them is independently planning to build an extensive library which will completely satisfy its own separate needs. Each of the liberal arts institutions projects science laboratories housing expensive equipment which will be in use only a few days during the year. Each of the institutions contemplates a faculty, with specialists in every academic field, capable of fulfilling all of its own scholastic requirements without reference to the faculties of any of the other institutions and in spite of the fact that it can use its specialists only to a limited extent in the fields of their specialties. Each of the institutions frequently struggles along with separate and inadequate arrangements for feeding its students, for providing for the health and guidance of its students, for procuring outside lecturers and musical programs, for the develop-

ment of audio-visual teaching aids, for the purchase of supplies, and for the other services incidental, but quite essential, to the educational process at which we refer to as the higher level. In general these institutions behave very much as though roads did not exist and that by some freak, the telephone, the teletypewriter, the bicycle, and the automobile had passed them by, at least for anything but their own circumscribed convenience.

Informal Cooperation

These would hardly seem the circumstances under which any general cooperative plan might develop. Yet if a study is made it will be discovered that, though the institutions might seem to be dealing with each other at arms length, over the years a number of formal or informal cooperative arrangements have been made. The institutions offering extension or evening programs will man the courses with faculty members from the other institutions. A professor from the seminary may give a full-time course in philosophy at one of the liberal arts colleges. Advanced students in chemistry from one of the colleges may be using the medical college laboratories. Three of the liberal arts colleges may have an arrangement whereby only one of them offers summer courses, with a full recognition of credits by the others. Two of the institutions may share an auditorium. These cooperative arrangements were made as a matter of convenience. They were not calculated to strengthen the overall local educational situation. The motivation was too often not the enrichment of the academic program, but the makeshift saving of pennies by presidents holding their cards very close to their chests. Yet, as all the flowers of all our tomorrows are in the seeds of today, so in these dissociated acts of cooperation are to be found all that is necessary, by way of basic concepts or of procedures, for the institutions of the community to strengthen themselves by strengthening each other and, by planning, enable themselves better to fulfill their educational responsibilities to their communities.

Two levels of inter-institutional cooperation should be distinguished. The first level of cooperative practices includes all of the arrangements just mentioned. They relieve the institution of the necessity for hiring a full time faculty member, or of offering summer school courses or, temporarily, of building a gymnasium. The block booking of lecturers and musical features enriches the academic programs at little cost. This is certainly justification

enough, and these arrangements must not be deprecated, but they hardly go to the core of the educational problem. Nothing in their practice will alter in the least the structure of higher education. If there is at present no rational pattern of relationships which might make it possible for institutions as a group to do together what they cannot do alone, nothing in the practice of these casual first level cooperative arrangements will bring it about. They have the advantage, however, that they are easily entered into, and they are important because through them a habit of cooperation may be developed.

The Upper Level of Cooperation: Joint Planning

The second level of inter-institutional cooperation involves practices and relationships which go directly to the heart of the educational responsibility of the college. Implicit in these arrangements is an abandonment of the nineteenth century concept of the college as an institution, alone and in isolation, capable of adequately educating its students. The concept had some validity at a time when the state of knowledge and the ends of education were such that all that was required were some benches and books and a few dedicated teachers. But vastly increased areas of knowledge demanding instruction by specialists, the need of expensive scientific equipment, the proliferation of necessary and costly books, have made the concept obsolete in the last half of the twentieth century. Cooperation on this level assumes that in the present crisis institutions will not be able to go it alone and do the best educational job possible. The essential characteristic of the second level of inter-institutional cooperation is that the relationships involve the joint planning of significant educational programs and the sharing of the facilities required to achieve excellence in education. Cooperation at this level means that each institution will not think in terms of a library containing all the books it would like to have, without reference to the other libraries in the area. Once each institutional library had established its basic collection of necessary books, areas of specialization would be recognized, to be followed by easy procedures for the exchange of books between institutions, and later perhaps by the establishment of a joint depository for little used books. Cooperation at this level means that costly equipment will be purchased jointly by several institutions and placed where it is most convenient to all.

Cooperation at this level means that each institution will not seek to man all of its departments with specialists, but, instead, the institutions will aspire to peaks of excellence in different academic areas, then share the specialists. One institution might specialize in languages, for example, assembling a strong faculty supported with all the necessary library and research facilities. Seniors at the other colleges majoring in languages would then travel to that institution for advanced work. Where a specialist could be used full time by two institutions he would be hired as a cooperative professor by both of the institutions. This would be normal operating procedure.

There is a sometimes stated fear that in this tradition the college will lose its independence. It is no answer to those who express this fear to say that each of these cooperative arrangements will be freely entered into and that at any point the institution might revert. Nor does it satisfy them to suggest that threatened freedom and independence are not the real deterrents, but rather the heavy hand of status quo and the paralyzing virus of inertia. For the independent way is the easy way, with an almost irresistible appeal to an harassed and soul-weary college president. The independent way is simpler and therefore more comprehensible to trustees. It is the way of blind loyalty, and therefore attractive to alumni. It is the way we would all follow, perhaps, if we were college presidents with unlimited funds. How satisfying, without conferences and without consultation, to build a library with tier after endless tier of books to satisfy students, faculty members—and even the librarian; to purchase whatever scientific equipment is desired, with no thought of cost; to fill the faculty with highly paid specialists, however many other faculties were despoiled, and however limited the usefulness of such a specialist. But fortunately, perhaps, funds are not unlimited, and we must be reasonable in spite of ourselves.

The Headaches of Cooperation

The cooperative way is the difficult way. New patterns of thought on the part of administrators and new patterns of performance on the part of faculty members must be developed. Countless conferences and endless committee meetings will be necessary. Lengthy consultations between institutional administrators must take place. The mere thought of the faculty-meeting debates is numbing, for here will be myriad issues that will give

small men far broader fields than they have ever known in which to exercise their limitations. These same issues, of course, will give men of vision the opportunity to place their institutions on the side of the future.

Since the thirties, and especially during the past decade, a number of arrangements have been developed among our colleges and universities giving them organizations through which they might more easily cooperate, but I will confine my further remarks to our experiences at the University Center in Virginia, because here I can talk with some authority on "hopes and reality."

Those who established the University Center in Virginia wisely stated its purpose vaguely and briefly—"to strengthen and enlarge the respective programs of the cooperating institutions." It has attempted to fulfill this purpose by cooperatively inaugurating programs the institutions could not undertake alone, and by providing the machinery whereby the institutions might better exploit the use of facilities already at hand within the state.

At this point I would like to discuss a few of the programs with you and tell you what has happened, how well we think each succeeded, and how these programs in every instance have led on to something new.

Faculty Research Program

It would be generally agreed that at the time the Center was established significant research was being accomplished at only two of the affiliated institutions. This was due primarily to a lack of funds, but also to a lack of a tradition for research in the quiet college towns of Virginia. Although presidents accepted the college's responsibility to make a contribution to learning and recognized the importance of research as a stimulus to good teaching, there was too great a pressure on them to use their limited funds for more obvious purposes. Also, until Virginia faculty salaries were raised to something approaching the national level, expenditures for any other purpose had the color of luxury. Under these circumstances even faculty members who wanted to do research were reluctant to appeal to presidents for additional funds. This was especially true of the lower ranks of the faculty, although they frequently held the greatest promise.

The solution, therefore, was to establish a relatively simple procedure by which sound research grants could be made. Standard application forms were printed and committees on research were

appointed on each campus, and the program was publicized. A Research Council was established at the Center, composed of representatives from each institution. The institutions agreed to match research grants to their own faculty members up to a fixed amount. This total varied from institution to institution according to the faculty potentials for research and presidential enlightenment. This latter factor, of course, was not unaffected by board-of-trustee enlightenment.

It was now possible for any faculty member, even a young instructor, who felt the urge to engage in research to do so provided he could meet certain conditions. His application was approved by his local committee members who knew him and who could estimate him as a research investment. Some applications were eliminated or returned for more careful consideration at this point. Back-scratching and local faculty politics remained a factor, but only until the application was forwarded to the Research Council of the Center. By then the application was standing pretty much on its own. On the theory that government and industry were providing funds for the sciences and for technical research, the areas of research for Center grants were limited to the humanities and the social sciences.

Beginning as a trickle, applications for research grants steadily increased as the availability of funds became known and the procedures became familiar. This program soon became one of the strongest of the cooperative programs of the Center, and research projects were developed on every one of the campuses.

Some of the grants were large enough to send seven faculty members abroad to complete research. Others provided for travel, or clerical help, or the purchase of microfilm. One archaeological expedition was financed. Institutional policy varied. Some made a few substantial grants, while others made small grants to a large number of faculty members. Institutions were able to hold out the possibility of subsidized research as an inducement to new instructors. Institutional imprints began to appear on books, and the number of papers read at meetings of learned societies by faculty members of the affiliated institutions increased. It is not easy to evaluate fully a program of this sort, but to those who have followed it, the change in attitude among the affiliated institutions with regard to research has been revolutionary. Only a contrast between the present situation and the research picture before this program was organized will give any suggestion of its success.

The research program in time has led to a pressure for making publication possible, and this then led to a consideration of the feasibility of setting up a University Center Press. The costs of operating a press and the necessity for heavy subsidy led to the abandonment of that idea. However, it has been agreed that the Center would seek funds for the publication of faculty research and that the machinery already set up for making the research grants would be utilized to determine what research should be published.

Along the same line there has been pressure for the development of a program for student research, with the hope that as a result more of the better students at our institutions might continue their studies into the graduate level and, even more hopefully, that a higher proportion of them might go into teaching. This in turn has led to the suggestion that the Center periodically publish the best products of such student research. It is thus that a cooperative program ramifies once it gets under way.

The Visiting Scholars Program

Despite modern highways, daily mails, the telephone and telegraph, and television, an unbelievable isolation is still possible in the small colleges of our American culture. Months may pass without significant contact with the academic world. This is good for neither faculty nor students. Among the institutions which were to become affiliated with the Center, the desirability of importing stimulating scholars was recognized. But the familiar "lack of funds" made adequate budgetary provision for such activity difficult.

There was a very good reason why, acting independently, our institutions had not established very impressive lecture programs. The cost of independently bringing a single lecturer from any distance with travel expenses, hospitality, and honorarium was more than most Virginia institutions could afford if anything close to a reasonable number of speakers was contemplated. To meet this situation, a cooperative plan was devised by which a distinguished scholar was invited to come to the area as the guest of the Center for a period of from three days to a week. A speaking program was set up for him which was sufficiently strenuous, but which placed him in Williamsburg with time to see the restored buildings, in Charlottesville with an opportunity to visit Monticello, and which involved pleasant driving over a large part

of Virginia. Depending somewhat on the speaker and his topics, he was called upon to address convocations, to give lectures in going courses, to talk before especially invited audiences, frequently including local townspeople, or to confer with members of faculties or interested students. These invitations seemed to be attractive to the speaker, especially if they brought him to Virginia in the spring. All the costs were then totaled and prorated among the institutions according to how much use each had made of the speaker. At first, because the program was novel and patterns of procedure had to be changed or newly devised, the program was wholly subsidized. Gradually the institutions have assumed the full costs of the program.

The Visiting Scholars Committee meets twice a year in Richmond to consider suggestions. Each member brings with him recommendation which he has solicited from his own faculty. This preliminary search is invaluable because the result represents the pooled information of all of our faculty members who at conferences and meetings of learned societies, from colleagues on other campuses, and from a great variety of sources have discovered that certain foreign scholars will be visiting America, or that scholars on the West Coast plan an eastern trip, or that a not too well-known professor who has preferred teaching to writing is a stimulating and provocative spaker with an irresistible knack for developing enthusiasm for his subject. An effort is also made to include a number of promising young scholars, lest students considering the academic life think of it only in terms of physical frailty and hoary locks. A number of women scholars are also deliberately included. There were also frequent requests from the affiliated institutions for lectures by faculty members from other Center-affiliated institutions. This cross-fertilization not only enhanced the reputation of the visiting lecturer, but helped to diminish some of the stupid and unworthy prejudices likely to exist between the best of institutions.

Cooperative Professors

Among the problems which must be met by the small liberal arts college as it faces educational competition with larger and better-endowed institutions are those of offering its students an adequately broad choice of courses and of providing instruction at an advanced level where the number of students is likely to be very small. An examination of the catalogues of our institutions

made these curricular gaps apparent. To meet this situation, a program of cooperative professors was developed. This program was based on the premise that, though a single institution might not have funds to hire a full-time professor to teach the few students in a newly offered course, it could afford to pay a share of the salary of one professor to be used cooperatively.

The first cooperative professor taught classes in speech and was shared by the University of Richmond, Randolph-Macon College, and the Presbyterian School of Christian Education. At the end of two years, the nature of speech offerings at the University of Richmond had been broadened. Speech was added as a course in the curriculum at Randolph-Macon, and at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education not only was a department of speech established but speech was made a required subject for all students.

The second professorship was in contemporary French literature. A distinguished French scholar was shared by three institutions. This time the students commuted to Glasgow House to take advanced courses, and members of the French faculties attended a specially planned seminar. These cooperative professorships were followed by ones in orchestral music and in the history of art. At present, arrangements are being completed for cooperative professorships in higher mathematics and sociology.

Adult Education

At the time the Center was established, two of our institutions were conducting evening programs, as were the public schools of Richmond. These programs were competitive and overcast by a tendency to give any course for which there was a demand. Standards were spotty and teachers generally underpaid. There was early recognition that this was an area in which much could be accomplished cooperatively. A coordinator of adult education was procured and a survey made of all courses in continuing education being given in the area and of adult interest in courses that might be offered. A Center Council on Adult Education was organized to advise on the program and regular meetings of the directors of the separate programs were arranged. At these meetings common problems were discussed and, more significantly, a few differences reconciled. Some of the advantages of institutional concentration in separate academic fields soon became obvious, and there was a growing sense of the need for an over-all coherence in the program, especially in the area of liberal arts offerings.

The University of Richmond agreed to be responsible for all evening courses in business administration; the Richmond Professional Institute gave all professional courses and courses in the liberal arts not offered by the University of Virginia, whose extension division had been persuaded to enter the Richmond area; graduate teacher training was handled by the University of Virginia and Virginia State College; all courses below college level were taken over by the public school program; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts offered noncredit courses in art. In 1955 Richmond was made one of the test cities in the Fund for Adult Education's program for non-credit continuing liberal education, and this effort was included in the cooperative program of the Center. A consolidated catalogue listing over three hundred courses was issued and a common promotional campaign was planned. Partly as a result of the publicity campaigns, but primarily because of the improved quality of the over-all program, registrations have almost tripled since the cooperative program was established —from under 3,000 in 1950, to 8,700 in 1961.

One of the matters early discussed by the Council on Adult Education was the possibility of organizing the coordinated program in adult education so that a student might earn a bachelor's degree over a period of time, mainly on the basis of evening work. This raised the ancillary problem of mutual recognition of evening college credits by Center institutions, and the question of how and by whom the degree would be conferred. These difficulties were finally settled. It was agreed that a student might take courses for credit in any one of the coordinated programs and that the University of Richmond, since it could count such work as done in residence, should grant the degree.

Library Affairs

One of the first committees appointed after the Center was established was the Committee on Library Activities, because practically every one of the institutions had a "library problem." Most of the institutions needed new or larger library buildings. All of them were seeking increased funds to buy more books and to obtain larger staffs. The librarians without exception were harried and overworked. Had we the gift of prescience, we should have realized that this was not the place to begin our cooperation.

After a Coordinator of Library Affairs had been appointed, several careful studies were made and a number of important nega-

tive conclusions drawn. It was decided not to establish a "bibliographical center" in Richmond because of the proximity to the Library of Congress. It was decided not to a establish a "deposit library" for little-used books and materials until all of our libraries were provided with reasonable space and had had an opportunity to weed out useless materials still on their shelves.

However, a Union List of Periodicals covering all of the libraries in the eastern part of Virginia was compiled and published. Arrangements were made for the microfilming of certain local newspapers. A gift of a research library of some 4,000 volumes was received and distributed to the institutions. A study was made to determine the feasibility of establishing a cooperative bookbindery.

I would like to continue discussing other cooperative programs with you because though we have moved much more slowly than I would have liked, the doing has always been interesting and frequently exciting. However, time forces me to a hurried conclusion. We have recently established a cooperative film library which will include in its holdings only films of unquestioned college level and films so costly that our institutions individually would hesitate to purchase them. A modest program of Eastern Studies has been inaugurated this year with the help of the national foundations interested in this field. Special exhibitions have been made available to the institutions, lectures on Asian topics have been arranged and it is planned to expand the program. We are presently exploring the feasibility of setting up a pool of portable scientific equipment.

Before ending this discussion of programs may I observe again how, once a program becomes established, it tends to ramify and extend itself in further directions. This suggests not only the need for the new development but perhaps an unconscious willingness to cooperate, once an easy modus operandi for cooperation has been established. The crucial difference between the university center and cooperative projects organized to accomplish a specific limited objective is that the university center has a separate and continuing existence and provides the machinery not only for administering existing cooperative programs but also for inaugurating new ones. A cooperative dynamic is developed in which one cooperative program suggests another, until the adminstrators and faculty members of the affiliated institutions find themselves to a surprising degree thinking cooperatively.

I can think of no more appropriate closing for my remarks than to quote Samuel B. Gould who has written:

"There are not so many as a double handful of colleges in this country capable because of their resources of going it alone during the next twenty-five years. We can survive and grow in strength by intelligent interaction or many of us will ultimately perish separately as our offerings become steadily more inadequate. I do not say this to be dramatic or sound the voice of doom; I say it because it is the simple truth."

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